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**Nuremberg Laws, September 15, 1935**

The Nuremberg Laws were anti-semitic laws (anti-jew laws) in Nazi Germany. These laws are named after the town in which they were fist announced. After the takeover of power in 1933 by Hitler, Nazism became an official ideology incorporating scientific racism and anti-semitism. Laws were passed that discriminated against Jewish people. The Nazi’s sometime encountered a problem; how to determine who was Jewish and who was not Jewish.

The lack of a clear legal method of defining who was Jewish had allowed some Jews to escape some forms of discrimination aimed at them. The enactment of the Nuremburg laws helped solve this problem by making it easier to identify who was Jewish.

The Nuremberg Laws classified people with four German grandparents as "German or kindred blood." People were classified as Jews if they descended from three or four Jewish grandparents. A person with one or two Jewish grandparents was a *Mischling*, a crossbreed, of "mixed blood". These laws deprived Jews of German citizenship, which meant they could no longer vote or hold public office. These laws also prohibited marriage between Jews and other Germans.

The Nuremberg Laws also included a ban on sexual intercourse between people defined as "Jews" and non-Jewish Germans. Nazis believed that Jewish people were inferior, and then babies produced by a German-Jewish couple would “soil” the blood of the German people. These laws paved the way for the Holocaust. The punishment for violating these laws were imprisonment or forced work in a labor camp.



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**Germany Remilitarizes the Rhineland, March 17, 1936**



The Rhineland is the Western section of Germany that borders France, Belgium and Luxemburg. The **Treaty of Versailles** forced Germany to de-militarization (remove troops from) this entire region. The purpose of de-militarizing this strip of land was to provide a buffer between Germany and other countries to the east. The hope was that if Germany was prevented from stationing troops in the Rhineland, Germany would be less likely to threaten to invade Belgium and France again, like they had in WWI.

In violation of the Treaty of Versailles, Nazi Germany remilitarized the Rhineland on Saturday, March 7, 1936. The occupation was done with very little military force, the troops entering on tractors, and no effort was made to stop Germany. France could not act due to political instability at the time. Britain could not immediately react to Germany’s remilitarization because of the timing. Since remilitarization occurred on a weekend, the British Government could not find out or discuss actions to be taken until the following Monday when the work week resumed. France and Britain’s failure to stop Germany’s remilitarization of the Rhineland led Germans to think that the League of Nations would not enforce the Treaty of Versailles.

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**Germany takes over Austria, March 12, 1938**

The Anschluss was the occupation and annexation (incorporation) of Austria into Nazi Germany in 1938. After WWI, Austria became its own country. Hitler promised the Germany people that he would bring the German people more land so they could extend their race. The Nazi party made well on this promise when they forced the Austiran leader—at the threat of invasion—to hand the country over to Germany.

Germany annexes Austria

Germany had been pressuring Austria for years to join a German empire. There were also some people in Austria who wanted to join Germany. Some of these supporters were Austrian Nazis. Austria found itself being pressured both internally and externally to join the German empire.

Devoted to remaining independent, Austria's Chancellor (leader) Kurt Schuschnigg tried to hold an election to determine the country’s future. Although Schuschnigg expected Austria to vote in favor of remaining an independent country, Austrian Nazis overthrew Schuschnigg before the election. When a group of people within a country use military force to overthrow a government it is called a **coup d’état.**

The new Nazi leaders of Austria then held a fraudulent election to determine whether Austria would join Germany. The fake vote resulted in exactly what the German and Austrian Nazis wanted—to merge Austria with Germany. This act violated the Treaty of Versailles, as Germany had been banned from taking over more land. Britain, France, and the United States did nothing but verbally reprimand Germany for violating the treaty. By incorporating Austria, Hitler’s Nazi Germany expanded its territory by roughly 20%.

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**The Munich Pact, September 30, 1938**

The Munich Pact was an agreement permitting Nazi German annexation (incorporation) of Czechoslovakia's Sudetenland. The Sudetenland was an area along the Czechoslovakian-German boarder, mainly inhabited by German speaking people. Nazi Germany wanted this land for three main reasons. First, Germany wanted to unite all German people under one empire. Because there were many Germans in the Sudenterland, Germany thought it was right for them to make this land part of Germany. Second, this strip of land contained almost all of Czechoslavakia’s defense. If Germany took this land, it would be much easier to invade and take over the rest of the country. Third, many of Czechoslavakia’s banks were located in the area, which meant easy access to money.

The original purpose of the conference that met at Munich was to discuss the future of the Sudetenland in the face of territorial demands made by Adolf Hitler. The agreement was made between the major powers of Europe—France, Germany, and Great Britain—without the presence of Czechoslovakia. Because Czechoslavakia was left out of the negotiations, and felt betrayed by their French and British allies, Czechs refer to this pact as the “Munich Betrayal.” By giving into Germany’s demands, France and Britain allowed Germany to expand its territory and grow stronger.



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**Invasion of Czechoslovakia March 16, 1939**

German occupation of **Czechoslovakia** began with the Nazi annexation of **Czechoslovakia's** border region known as the Sudetenland. Hitler said he needed this land to protect the German speaking people who lived there from mistreatment. However, the German speaking people of the Sudetenland were not being mistreated. Nonetheless, Britain and France allowed Germany to take this land because Hitler promised it would be the last land he would take. Britain and France foolishly believed Hitler.



Nazi troops invade Czechoslovakia in 1939

Following the Nazi take over of Austria in March 1938, Hitler started his conquest of **Czechoslovakia**. The incorporation of Sudetenland into Nazi Germany left the rest of **Czechoslovakia** weak. The remaining land of **Czechoslovakia** became powerless to stop an invading army. On March 16, 1939, the German army moved into the remainder of **Czechoslovakia**. Hitler now claimed all of **Czechoslovakia** as part of the German empire. More land and more people would add vital resources to the Nazi war machine.

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**Night of Broken Glass, November 9, 1938**

**Kristallnacht**, or the Night of Broken Glass was a series of attacks against Jews throughout Nazi Germany on November 9th, 1938.

Jewish homes were ransacked, as were shops, towns and villages. German stormtroopers and German civilians destroyed buildings with sledgehammers, leaving the streets covered in pieces of smashed windows—the origin of the name "Night of Broken Glass." Ninety-one Jews were killed, and 30,000 Jewish men—a quarter of all Jewish men in Germany—were taken to concentration camps, where they were tortured for months. Over 1,000 of them died from torture. Around 1,668 synagogues were ransacked and 267 were set on fire. In Vienna alone 95 synagogues or houses of prayer were destroyed.

Interior of a synagogue in Germany

Martin Gilbert writes that no event in the history of German Jews between 1933 and 1945 was so widely reported as it was happening. The accounts from the foreign journalists working in Germany sent shock waves around the world. The Times of London wrote at the time: "No foreigner bent upon blackening Germany before the world could outdo the tale of burnings and beatings, of blackguardly assaults on defenseless and innocent people, which disgraced that country yesterday."

The trigger of the attacks was the assassination of German diplomat Ernst vom Rath by Herschel Grynszpan, a German-born Polish Jew in Paris, France. Kristallnacht was followed by further economic and political persecution of Jews, and is viewed by historians as part of Nazi Germany's broader racial policy, and the beginning of the Holocaust.

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**Soviet Union Declares Neutrality**

Like Czechoslavakia, Poland had a sizable German-speaking population. In the spring of 1939, Hitler began his familiar routine, charging that Germans in Poland were mistreated by the Poles and needed his protection. He had said this same thing about German speaking people in Austria before the Nazi’s took Austria. Hitler had said the same thing about Czechoslovakia before the Nazi’s invaded Czechoslovakia.



Some people thought that this time Hitler must be bluffing. After all, an attack on Poland might bring Germany into conflict with the Soviet Union, Poland’s eastern neighbor. At the same time, such an attack would most likely provoke a declaration of war from France and Britain—both of whom had promised military aid to Poland. The result would be a two-front war.: Germany would have to defend itself on the West and the East. Fighting on two fronts had exhausted Germany in WWI. Surely, many thought, Hitler would not be foolish enough to repeat that mistake.

Hitler took the chance, though, and his luck held. As tensions rose over Poland, Joseph Stalin (the leader of the Soviet Union) decided he had more to lose than to gain in a war against Germany. On August 23, 1939, the Soviet Union and Germany signed a nonaggression pact in which they agreed not to fight each other. With the danger of a two-front war eliminated, the fate of Poland was sealed. Hitler would soon take over Poland.

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**Lightning War, 1939**

**Blitzkrieg** (German, "lightning war") describing Germany’s strategy for fighting in WWII. In this strategy, Germany would overwhelm its enemies by launching an immediate, all out invasion of a foreign country. Nazi Germany would deploy all their tanks, infantry, artillery and air power at once. Germany was able to quickly break through enemy lines, and once broken, proceeding without regard to its flank. Through constant motion, the **blitzkrieg** attempts to keep its enemy off-balance, making it difficult to respond effectively at any given point before the front has already moved on.

Germany uses “lightening war” to invade Poland

During the interwar period, Germany developed aircraft and tank technologies. These developments combined with intelligence allowed Germany to bypassing of enemy strong points. When Germany invaded Poland in 1939, Western journalists adopted the term blitzkrieg to describe this form of armored warfare. Blitzkrieg operations were very effective during the campaigns of 1939 - 1941. These operations depended on surprise attacks, general enemy unpreparedness and an inability of the enemy to react quickly to the attacker's offense. This military strategy was extremely effective and gave Germany the upper hand in most European battles.

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